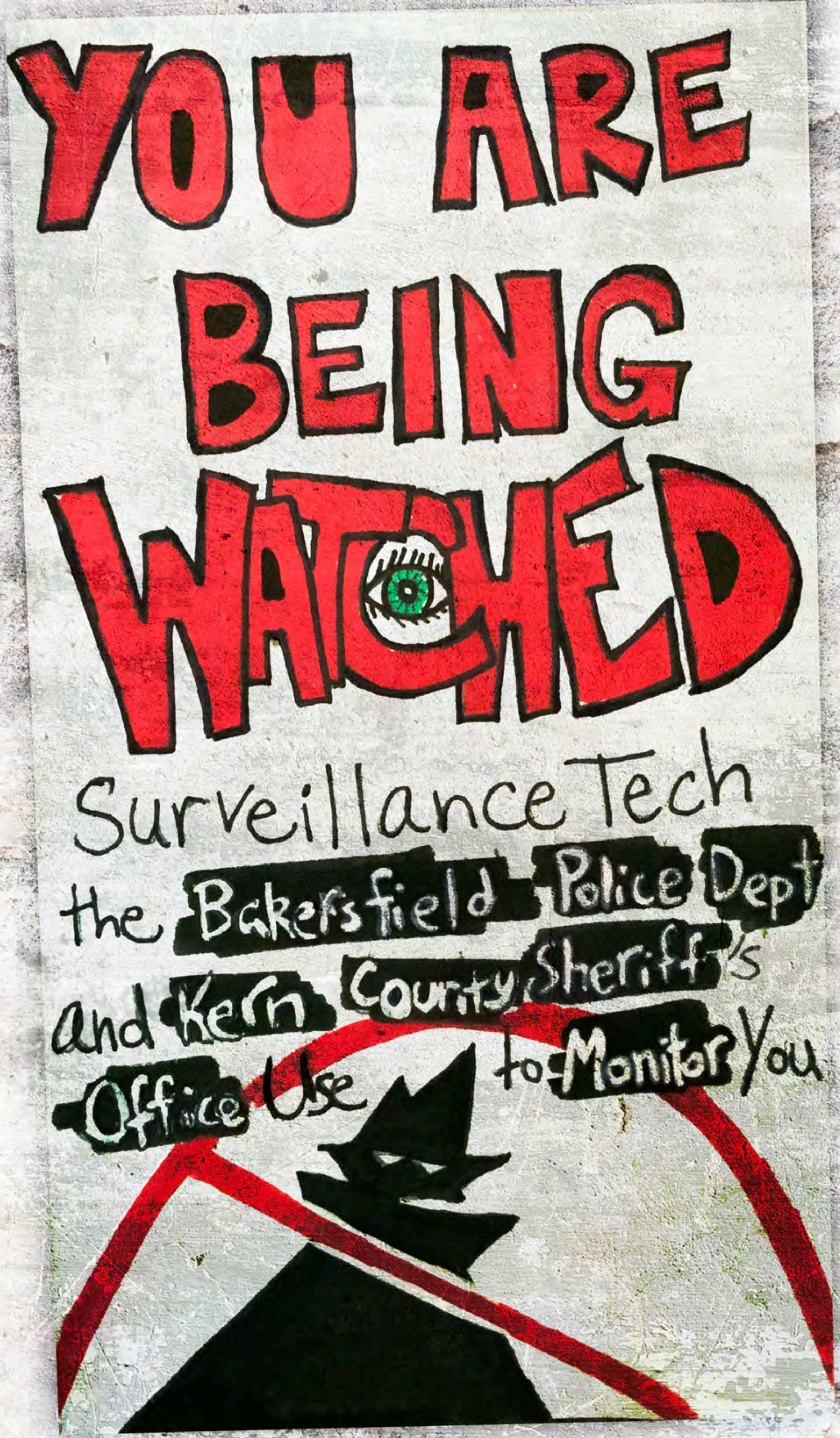

YOU ARE BEING WATCHED
Surveillance Tech the Bakersfield Police Dept and Kern County Sheriff's Office Use to Monitor You

Hey Neighbor.

Whether the scourges of surveillance and policing are new to you or intimately and painfully known, these mechanisms of oppression carved the backbone of America out of real human lives. From the blueprints of slave ships, to lantern laws, to predictive policing and the ICE raids in Kern County January 2025, this is business as usual for those in power. And it's our business to stand up against it.

I wrote this zine to serve as a mile marker. Here's where we are, in Kern County, June 2025.

Where we go from here is up to us.

—Ariel Dyer 6-9-25

FY👁'S

BEFORE YOU READ:

* Law enforcement agencies share information and, if it's legally thorny to do so (i.e. between local police and ICE), they find a workaround (i.e. Fusion Centers).

* This zine is NOT comprehensive. If purchased via private funding, we won't necessarily know whether or not various law enforcements use specific tech. Check out ACLU's list of common surveillance tech for more commonly used tools (Resources page).

AUTOMATED LICENSE PLATE READERS (ALPRs)

What is it?

ALPRs are cameras used to take photographs of license plates. Not to be confused with intersection cameras that snap photos of red light runners, these readers capture every car that passes them.

Who uses it?

Bakersfield Police (BPD) - Since 2021
Kern County Sheriff (KCSO) - since 2024
Shafter PD - since 2024
Delano PD - since 2023
Ridgecrest PD - since 2024

How Much $$?

BPD spent $308 700 on a 3-year contract with Flock Safety. In total, BPD uses 58 ALPRs (that we know of).

SHOTSPOTTER

What is it?

Gunshot detectors that use microphones to triangulate where a gun has been used. Some research has indicated that this tech does not reduce crime and is used more heavily in communities of color.

Who uses it?

BPD - since 2018

How much $$?

The initial 2-year contract was paid using a $450k Project Safe Neighborhood Grant.

The latest info for annual cost that I could find (a 2022 23ABC article) gives a $223k/year price tag.

DRONES

What is it?

Drones are unmanned, remotely operated video cameras that fly. Another acronym for drones is unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

Who uses it?

BPD - 28 drones since 2023
KCSO - 13 drones since 2023
Delano PD - unknown amount since 2024

How much $$?

Again, this was hard to find. KCSO's Military Equipment Report 22-23 states that they spent $16,300 on seven drones.

BODYCAMS

What is it?

Bodycams are video/audio recording devices worn by cops. You'll know if they're on because they beep loudly every so often. While these can create more transparency between the police and the public, it can also open a can of privacy concerns.

Who uses it?

CSUB - since 2018 BPD - since 2020
KCSO - since 2017 Wasco PD - since 2023
Tehachapi & Taft PDs - since ??

How much $$?

Depends on the company and length of contract. In 2020, the city of Bakersfield spent $737,000 on getting 215 more bodycams through the vendor Axon, Inc.

CAMERA REGISTRIES

What is it?

KCSO's voluntary civilian camera registry enables individual people and businesses to register their own surveillance systems. KCSO can reach out to those on the registry to request footage.

Who uses it?

KCSO

How much $$?

In dollar amount, it's free. In ethical measurements, it costs registrants approximately 1.3 human souls.

WHAT NOW?

An Update

After writing this, I learned that BPD has entered into a contract with Axon from 2024-2029 for a total cost of $4,128,036.81. They are now requesting to amend that agreement to an even more obscene $4,326,375.63 (adding "additional storage, licenses, and interview room services").

Do we really want to invest against our communities like this? Is the "transparency" we buy with surveillance tech worth the cost? If you don't think so, then speak up! Get involved with orgs like People's Budget Bako and Kern County Criminal Justice Coalition.

RESOURCES

The following sources helped me write this zine, and are great launching points for further reading:

- Atlas of Surveillance
  atlasofsurveillance.org
  ↳ an open source database of police tech used in communities
- ACLU's "Community Control Over Police Surveillance: Technology 101"
- Electronic Frontier Foundation
  eff.org
  ↳ developer of Atlas of Surveillance and other cool privacy and security tools for the layperson.
- Library Freedom Project
  libraryfreedom.org
  ↳ network of library workers that build information democracy.

CONTACT ME

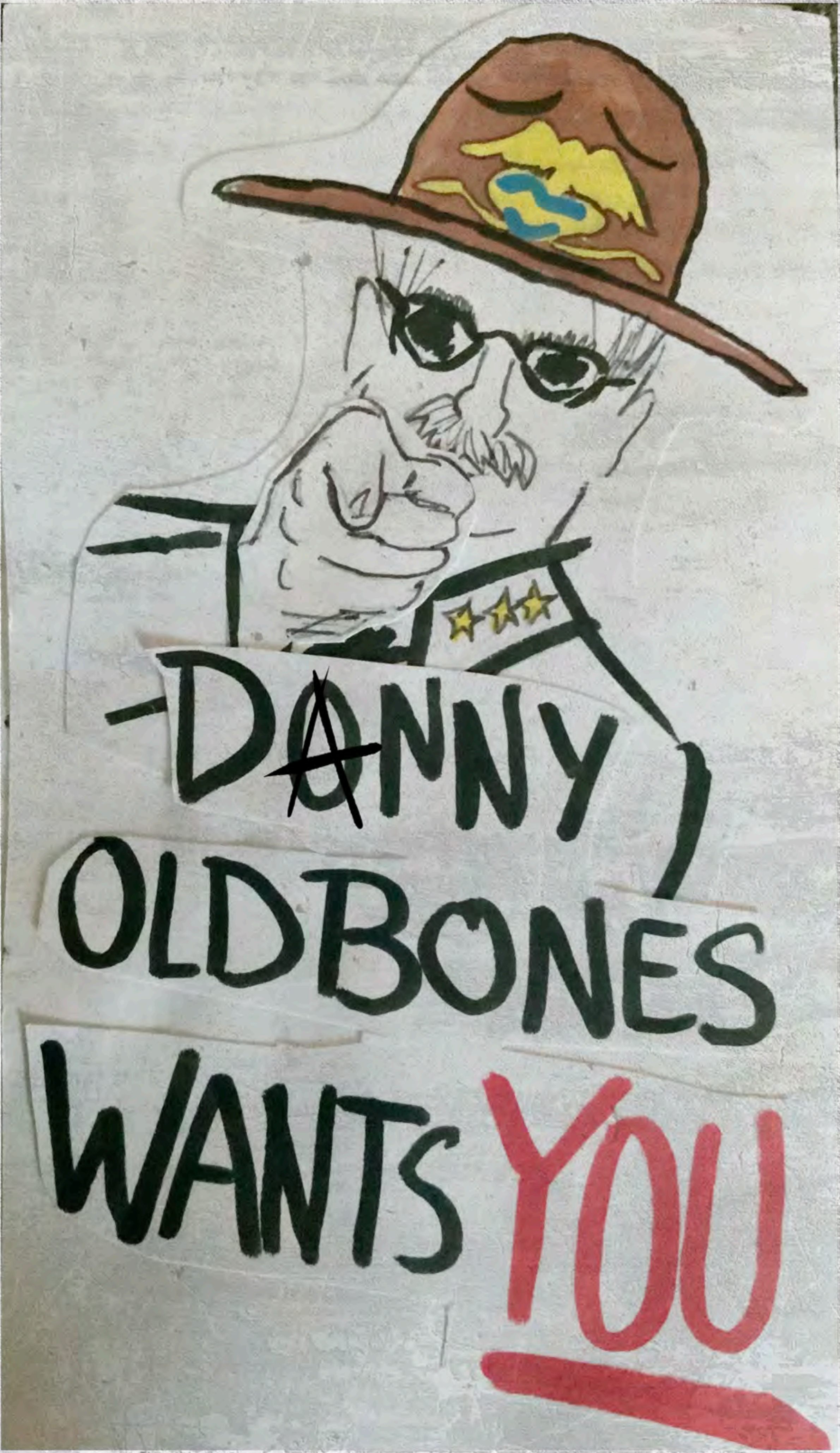
HI! I am a librarian interested in data privacy, intellectual freedom, and anti-carceral alternatives to policing.

If you would like to:

- say hey
- ask a question
- get free privacy consultation or training for you and/or your grassroots org,

hit me up on Signal

@ poetoaster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WANTS YOU